



Shumei International Institute

Attn: Forest Plan Revision
Dan Dallas, Supervisor
Rio Grande National Forest
1803 W. Highway 160
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Delivered via mail and E-mail to: rgnf_forest_plan@fs.fed.us

December 27, 2017

Dear Supervisor Dallas:

The Shumei International Institute (SII) is a spiritually based 501(c)3 not for profit corporation headquartered in Crestone Colorado. SII owns significant acreage contiguous with the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF), including a portion of land we allow foot access across to the RGNF via the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon. We are deeply appreciative of our relationship with the USDA/National Forest Service and for your planning process and land management of these public lands.

Crestone Colorado is one of three sacred pilgrimage sites in the world for Shumei and the only one outside of Japan for our worldwide membership and is considered Shumei's "Sacred Earth Center". Thousands of Shumei members visit Crestone on pilgrimage retreats to experience the pristine nature, unparalleled views, deep silence and dark night skies to name a few of the highly significant qualities of this area. I have come to realize we cannot take these qualities for granted, as places such as this and protected wild-wilderness is not the norm and is under ever increasing pressure from civilization.

In my capacity as Shumei's Operations Manager I previously served for 4 years on the Saguache Resource Advisory Committee representing a "national recognized environmental group". I currently serve as the chairman of the Saguache-Upper Rio Grande Resource Advisory Committee. In my volunteerism in serving on these RAC committees I have seen and heard almost every conceivable perspective on the use of public lands and collaborated in positive ways with many special interest groups who utilize our public lands. I include mention of this only to show that not only do I 'walk the talk' of working for our public lands, but to indicate that I do not make my recommendations to, and on behalf of, the Shumei organization lightly or in an uninformed manner.

I clearly recognize, that together at this moment we have a once in a generation opportunity to preserve a significant portion of these public lands we know and love in a pristine state. We (Myself and Shumei's national and international membership) appeal to you to do everything within your authority to make decisions for maximal wilderness designation. In support of such a decision, I am writing on behalf of our international membership's (in excess of 350,000 members worldwide) *strongest* support for the conservation designations in Alternative D, specifically including the 285,000 acres recommended for wilderness, Carnero and Jim Creek

Native Fish Areas, Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area, the Spruce-Osier connectivity area and the expanded La Ventana Special Interest Area (SIA).

I support designation of these areas for several reasons. First, recommending deserving places for wilderness will guarantee that certain places within the San Luis Valley continue to protect the solitary experience, and remain pristine and undeveloped. Additionally, we wish to make sure that the national forest provides good habitat for fish and wildlife, landscape level connectivity, and outstanding nature-based recreation.

While we support the full array of recommended designations in Alternative D, we are also in complete accord with our local public advocacy group the San Luis valley Eco System Council as well as the national advocacy group The Wilderness Society's more specific recommendations and request *that at a minimum* the following places be recommended for wilderness designation for the following well researched and logical reasons:

Sangre de Cristo Recommended Wilderness Additions (Butterfly Creek-Miller Creek, Cotton Creek, Kit Carson Peak and Blanca Peak additions).

Thank you for including these areas in Alternatives B and D. These additions will effectively extend the wilderness to logical landscape boundaries to protect the scenic integrity and biodiversity of the stunning mountain backdrop and strengthen protection for the two most visited peaks in the Sangres.

Wannamaker Creek-Deep Creek and Wason Park additions to the La Garita Wilderness (Saguache Ranger District). Wannamaker-Deep Creek addition includes five miles of the South Fork of Saguache Creek. The area is naturally appearing, and supports a broad diversity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats and contains a largely undisturbed hydrological regime. There are no vehicle routes or past management activities within the proposed wilderness addition. Wason Park is 22,000 acres and is the single largest potential wilderness addition adjacent to any wilderness on the Rio Grande NF.

Additions to South San Juan Wilderness (Conejos Peak Ranger District). *Thank you for including these areas in Alternatives B and D.* The Cumbres Addition adds the lower four miles of the Elk Creek valley to the wilderness, with one of the major access trails into the wilderness and outstanding fishing. Lowermost elevations below 9,000 feet include impressive stands of several-hundred-year-old ponderosa pines. The Adams Fork addition is a documented high use area for lynx and was part of one of the initial core areas lynx established after reintroduction. It also supports a recreation population of Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

Antora Meadows Recommended Wilderness is a critical area for regional wildlife connectivity and conservation that will help fill the largest gap in protected areas in the Southern Rockies between La Garita Wilderness on south and Collegiades and Sangres to the north. Protecting it will increase ecosystem functions currently under-represented in the wilderness system, as well as conservation of imperiled or at-risk species: Rio Grande cutthroat

trout conservation population; and habitat for lynx, wolverine, and Mexican spotted owl. In addition, it has a lot of trails and is great for recreation.

Saguache Creek Recommended Wilderness is mainly grasslands and ponderosa pine, low-elevation ecosystems that desperately need more protection in the wilderness system. It also, like Antora Meadows, helps fill in major gaps in regional protected areas networks and offers outstanding recreation. The recommended area includes seven miles of an eligible wild river.

We understand that designating recommended wilderness areas, wildlife connectivity areas, native fish areas will mean that these areas would not see industrial activities for the duration of the land management plan. It is of extreme importance to us that oil and gas surface development is not allowed in these places to protect their special values. It is also important to us that the plan have enforceable provisions to protect water and wildlife. In the face of ever-increasing threats of resource extraction and over-development, we urge you to safeguard these high value conservation lands now to protect our local economy, natural heritage, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and livelihood for future generations.

Perhaps the most well known quote of Shumei's founder Mokichi Okada (1882 – 1955) is "Nature can teach us everything." And to that I would add we are nature. I have seen first hand on hundreds of occasions with visitors ranging from young children to elderly adults, the profound impact that the wild in wilderness can bring about in reconnecting us to our own wild nature. So many troubles that plague the world today stem from that simple disconnect in our human forgetfulness that nature is somehow something apart from us, something "out there". Surely, in your position and with your knowledge of this landscape nature has taught you this as well.

I have faith that you will make choices for preservation and want you to know that no matter what other pressures you may be under for other alternatives, that your decision for maximal preservation is, and will continue to be, well supported quite literally by tens of thousands of people ranging from San Luis Valley residents, U.S. citizens and international visitors.

I leave you with one last quote, this one a spontaneous utterance from the mouth of my 5 year old son (from the mouth of babes!) one summer morning as we were headed up Middle Creek to go fishing earlier this year, I keep it on my refrigerator and on my desk at work. He said "Thank you for the wild, without her there would be no beauty."

Sincerely yours,



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Operations Manager

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